

HOUSTON, SAM

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# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

Sam Houston

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

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## Lincoln to Sam Houston

By Howard C. Westwood

In September 1861 Sam Houston wrote a letter, published in a Texas newspaper, saying that, as war loomed, he had been "tendered the aid of seventy thousand men and means to sustain myself in Texas by adhering to the Union" but that he had rejected the offer.<sup>1/</sup> Since then the story has been told, in various versions, that Abraham Lincoln had offered Houston military support to resist rebellion in Texas. How much of the story can be verified?

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One thing is clear. From the time Texas became a State in the Union it had excited great interest in the North. The Congressional resolution of March 1, 1845, providing for an agreement with the Republic of Texas to join the Union, specified that, by future agreement, Texas might be divided into as many as five separate States.<sup>2/</sup> While some such potential division doubtless had appeal to Southern States as a means of maintaining slavery's position in the Senate as more States entered the Union, it sparked interest, too, among anti-slavery elements. For there was strong hope, among many, that great reaches of the vast Texas territory, perhaps with a center at San Antonio, the State's largest town, would become a land of freedom. That hope led even to something of a movement to encourage non-slaveholders to migrate to Texas -- especially immigrants from Germany and England -- to buttress anti-slavery sentiment.<sup>3/</sup>

As the sectional conflict approached crisis there seemed signs that Texas was different from other States of the deep South. Its Governor, Sam Houston, who had taken office in December 1859, insisted that election of a Black Republican as President could offer no excuse for disunion. He went so far as to proclaim that there was no constitutional right to secede, that secession would be revolution, and he would "raise the standard of revolution" only if the Lincoln government were to trample on the constitutional rights of Texas.<sup>4/</sup> In the last pre-war Congress a Texan ally of Houston, Andrew Jackson Hamilton, was firmly pro-Union, as he remained even after he had returned home and when war came.<sup>5/</sup>

The impression in the North that Texas was not solid for secession was so strong that it abided during the armed struggle. In the summer of 1861, General George B. McClellan, asked by the President for his strategic thinking, listed Texas as a potential objective "for the purpose of protecting and developing the latent Union and free-State sentiment well known to predominate in Western Texas . . ."<sup>6/</sup> As Edwin M. Stanton was becoming Secretary of War in January 1862, he met with General Benjamin Butler to be briefed on a proposition for an invasion of Texas from the Gulf coast on to San Antonio to "arm the Union German population and other Union men and attempt to revolutionize the State and detach it from the Confederacy."<sup>7/</sup> By the fall of 1862 Stanton was intending that an expedition being organized by General Nathaniel P. Banks would invade the Texas coast and that, after a force assembled by General John A. McClernand had cleared the Mississippi, Banks and McClernand

would cooperate.<sup>8/</sup> Also in the fall of that year, ex-Congressman Hamilton, who finally had had to flee his Texas home and had escaped via Mexico to come North, was invested by Washington with the mantle of military governor of Texas; it was thought that he could lead thousands of Texans eagerly awaiting opportunity to liberate their land from Richmond's grasp.<sup>9/</sup>

That an impression so deep as to endure after war's coming makes it plausible to assume that Lincoln and his advisers would have thought well of opportunity in Texas when, immediately after his inauguration, they began their appraisal of moves to preserve the Union. However, unlike the situation in South Carolina, about which they could be fairly well posted, they could not ascertain exactly, much less quickly, what Texans really were up to. For all along Texas had been far distant. Even by the end of 1860 the State boasted but 407 miles of railroad, all, save for a couple of tiny detached lines of a few miles, in a small network radiating from Houston. Both Austin, the State's capital, and San Antonio were far from any railroad. Nor was there a mile of railroad from Texas beyond its borders; and extremely limited mileage in Louisiana extending west from the Mississippi was nowhere near.<sup>10/</sup> Thus it was not possible for people to get back and forth easily between Washington and Texas, as it was between Washington and South Carolina. Nor could news come reasonably fully and speedily from Texas, despite the North's special interest in it. Perusal of the New York Times during March and early April 1861 reveals the problem. Though it carried Texas news rather frequently, mainly that news was skeletal.



Items with barest facts would be sent, apparently by vessel, from Galveston to New Orleans, only then to be transmitted by wire. Moreover, interpretive dispatches -- and they inaccurate -- could take a month or more in coming, a delay, in those fast-moving days, making the matter ancient history.<sup>11/</sup> In short, Lincoln and his advisers during the eventful first six weeks of his Presidency could know little of day-to-day happenings in Texas and were ill equipped to construe them accurately.

Those happenings had been swift and complex during the weeks prior to Lincoln's inauguration and immediately following. Advocates of secession had been clamoring for a convention, but Governor Houston had refused to call one. Despite him, a group called one irregularly and it assembled in late January. Though by no means fully representative of the State's populace and not formally recognized by the Governor, the Texas House allowed it to meet in its chambers during a special session of the Legislature that Houston, under pressure, had called. Promptly, on February 1, the convention adopted an ordinance of secession to be submitted to a popular vote. The Legislature approved such a submission, so Houston recognized the convention to the extent of having power to propose secession and cooperated in an order for the referendum which was held on February 23.<sup>12/</sup>

The vote favored the ordinance, 46,129 to 14,697. So, after awaiting the official count, Governor Houston dutifully proclaimed the State's secession from the Union on March 4, by coincidence

the day of Lincoln's inauguration. On the next day the convention took a long step further. It voted that Texas be united with the Confederate States of America. Even before the official count on the referendum and Houston's proclamation, the convention had sent delegates to what had become the Confederate capital at Montgomery, Alabama, and there they were seated in the Confederate Congress. The Confederate Secretary of War actually wrote to Houston, on March 2, that the President of the Confederacy was assuming control of military operations in Texas. That further action by the convention was too much for Sam Houston. He insisted that it had been empowered to do no more than to propose secession, that it had no authority to submit the State to another sovereignty. Rather, he insisted, there should be a new convention, properly called, to determine what the restored Republic of Texas should do.<sup>13/</sup>

Defiantly, on March 14, the convention adopted another ordinance, requiring all officers of the State to take an oath of loyalty to the Confederacy. Houston refused to do so. Thereupon the convention declared that his office was vacant and that the Governor's powers were transferred to the Lieutenant Governor, who was sworn in as the new Governor on March 18. Houston insisted that he was still Governor, but he rejected violent resistance to the new regime. On March 19 he was packing his family's effects, to move from the Executive Mansion. Though he maintained that the governorship was still his, he lived out his life in retirement.<sup>14/</sup>

In the meantime, not a little had been happening on the military front in Texas.



Back in February 1860 Colonel Robert E. Lee had been assigned to temporary command of the United States military Department of Texas, headquartered in San Antonio. He had held that command during the rising tension of 1860 until succeeded by General David E. Twiggs in December, when Lee was returned to his regular command, that of the 2d Cavalry at one of the several remote posts of the Department of Texas.<sup>15/</sup> There, in early February, he received an order of the War Department relieving him of his regimental command and directing that he report in person to General-in-Chief Winfield Scott in Washington by the first of April. On the afternoon of February 16 he arrived in San Antonio on his way to Washington.<sup>16/</sup> One of the fascinating speculations of our history is what might have been happening at that time in San Antonio had Lee been still in command of the Department. It is possible that the Civil War would have been opened then and there with Robert E. Lee in defense of the Union.<sup>17/</sup>

But with Twiggs in command what was happening was not war. Even as Twiggs was assuming command he was sure that the secession of Texas was imminent and he had put to Washington the question of what should be done with the public property under his responsibility. He received no clear instruction. As tension mounted, in mid-January he sent to Washington a request that he be relieved of the command. In late January an order was mailed him to turn over his command to his next senior in the Department, Colonel Carlos A. Waite, but that order was not received in San Antonio until February 15. Since Waite was then at a post some 60 miles away the order could not be executed for several days. Already, as the

secession convention was meeting in late January, Twiggs had written Washington that, since he had received no instruction, he proposed peacefully to surrender his public property to the State were that to be demanded.<sup>18/</sup>

Just before Twiggs received the order for his relief, State authorities had come to him to seek transfer to the State of the United States property. They were acting under the authority of the convention, not the Governor. On January 20, the eve of the convention's meeting, Houston had written Twiggs that he had information that there would be an effort "by an unauthorized mob to take forcibly and appropriate the public stores and property to uses of their own, assuming to act on behalf of the State." So he was sending an officer to Twiggs to learn whether he would "consider it your duty" to turn over the public property to an officer of the State "on the order of the [State] Executive." Twiggs's reply had been that he had no instruction from Washington as to what to do in the event of the State's secession and that, were there secession and the State's Executive to make a demand, "he will receive an answer."<sup>19/</sup> Now, when agents of the convention came to Twiggs to take over the public property, presumably he felt the move premature, that secession was contingent on the outcome of the imminent popular referendum. The question was under negotiation with Twiggs on February 15 when his relief order was received. Under that order Twiggs's power would end as soon as Colonel Waite could arrive on summons from his post, and Waite was known to be Unionist. That precipitated action by the convention agents. On the night of

February 15 a motley band of 1,000 armed men as State troops, led by a State colonel (Ben McCulloch, a hardy secessionist), marched into San Antonio to supersede negotiation with peremptory demand. Twiggs caved in. On February 16 he agreed to surrender the public property.<sup>20/</sup> Upon Lee's arrival that afternoon he became indignant on finding that the military authority there no longer was that of the United States. It was a deeply troubled Lee who proceeded onward. He reached his home, Arlington, on March 1 -- the day that, at the War Department, an order was issued dismissing Twiggs from the United States Army "for his treachery to the flag of his country."<sup>21/</sup>

Colonel Waite did reach San Antonio on February 19 to take over what had become an empty command.<sup>22/</sup> Faced with a fait accompli, he set about arranging for the departure from Texas of all the United States military force in the Department as soon as means of transport could be sent him, as he requested in a report to Army Headquarters that he dispatched on February 26. The State authorities apparently would allow their departure after assembling from widely scattered posts at specified coastal ports. The total of officers, men, laundresses and servants would be 3,696. It would take weeks, of course, for all that to be accomplished.<sup>23/</sup> In the end, most did get away. But by mid-April rumor was reaching Waite that forces of the State -- by then long since fully seceded -- would make captives of all who had not yet left. Indeed, on April 23 Waite and those of his officers still in San Antonio were arrested by what had become Confederate military. Even non-officers,

not yet evacuated, were made Confederate captives.<sup>24/</sup> For Civil War, by then, had been launched.

In the meantime, in Washington, there had been uncertainty and vacillation about what to do concerning United States forces in the deep South. There is reason to believe that General Scott viewed Texas as so remote that it would be prudent to minimize risk of incidents beyond Washington's control that would precipitate unintended conflict. Even before General Twiggs's cave-in, a steamer had been ordered to sail from New York to Texas "to bring out the companies of artillery and as many as possible of infantry," and had departed on February 15. After intermediate stops, it reached Indianola, on the Texas coast, on March 2 and sent word to San Antonio to have the artillery companies march to the mouth of the Rio Grande where the steamer would await them.<sup>25/</sup> That had occurred before Lincoln's inauguration. Then, doubtless after the inauguration, Army Headquarters received Colonel Waite's February 26 request for transport from Texas of all his Department forces and, on March 12, there was dispatched to him a direction from General Scott that those forces should be embarked for New York.<sup>26/</sup>

One week later, however, on March 19, General Scott sent off a further message to Colonel Waite. It was taken by courier, a Lieutenant Collins. It ordered Waite to "form a strongly-intrenched camp," covering Indianola on the Texas coast, "of not less than five hundred, but preferably twelve hundred, men, and hold the same against hostile Texans until further orders." Any troops beyond those needed for the intrenched camp were to be

evacuated. The object was "to keep a foothold in that State till the question of secession on her part be definitely settled among her own people," and, "in case of conflict between them, to give such aid and support to General Houston or other head of authority in the defense of the Federal Government as may be within your power." The order directed Waite to "communicate as freely as practicable with General Houston or other leader of the Union party, and comply with his wishes or suggestions, if practicable." It also said, "A field battery and some heavier guns, together with subsistence and other necessities, will be sent to you as your wants may become known."<sup>27/</sup>

On March 31, long after the embarkations from the mouth of the Rio Grande had occurred<sup>28/</sup> and after delivery of General Scott's direction of March 12, but before Lieutenant Collins had arrived with the March 19 message, Colonel Waite in San Antonio received "through the agency of an influential Union man" two letters sent from Austin on March 29. One was from Houston, recently deposed but insisting that he was still the rightful Governor; the other was from one F. W. Lander.<sup>29/</sup>

Houston's letter said that he understood that Waite had, or soon would have, "orders to concentrate United States troops under your command at Indianola, in this State, to sustain me in the exercise of my official functions." Houston declined such assistance and would "most earnestly protest against the concentration of troops or fortifications in Texas, and request that you move all such troops out of this State at the earliest day practicable, or,



at any rate, by all means take no action toward hostile movements till further ordered by the Government at Washington City, or particularly of Texas."<sup>30/</sup>

The Lander letter began, "I have reached Texas as confidential messenger of the administration to the governor of the State. Lieutenant-General Scott, by request of the Secretary of State, and indorsed by the President, allowed me to peruse your late instructions brought on by Lieutenant Collins. The object of these instructions was directly connected with my mission. They necessarily fail, from the determination of Governor Houston to protest against such military aid being rendered him." The letter proceeded, "If, consistently with your own views, you can await further instructions from Washington prior to making the intrenched camp at Indianola, or, in fact, taking any step which will lead the secession party of Texas to imagine that the Government proposes to coerce them, I should regard it a high act of patriotism, and, under the present information, of duty." The letter then paraphrased (somewhat inaccurately) a portion of the letter of General Scott carried by Lieutenant Collins and suggested that Waite would be justified in making no "intrenched camp" until he could hear further from Washington after Lander's return there, a return which would be "immediate."<sup>31/</sup>

If Colonel Waite, on reading those letters, wondered what was going on, things were clarified on the next day, April 1, when he received two more communications. The first was General Scott's March 19 letter, brought by Lieutenant Collins. The second was



brought by another courier from Washington who arrived a few hours after Collins, bringing a duplicate of the March 19 letter to which Scott had added an important postscript. The postscript said that if neither Houston nor other Texas authority had "any considerable number of men up in arms in defense of the Federal Government . . . you will consider the foregoing instructions as withdrawn . . ."

That postscript made Waite's course clear. At once, on April 1, he wrote Army Headquarters in Washington, enclosing copies of the letters to him from Houston and Lander, and reporting that Unionists in Texas had no thought of opposition to secession by force, that, rather, they intended to effect peaceful change "in the views of the inhabitants of the State" through "the press and ballot-box." So, said Waite, he would proceed with the evacuation of his troops according to the March 12 direction from General Scott.<sup>32/</sup>

Colonel Waite was not acting without sound basis. Undoubtedly he had received reliable fill-in from the "influential Union man" who had brought the letters from Austin. Doubtless, too, he knew that F. W. Lander was a man of importance. Frederick West Lander had achieved very considerable fame in the far west. Since the early fifties he had been a leading explorer and engineer working on transcontinental routes, and most recently had been superintendent of one of the principal wagon roads. Also he had been somewhat active in Democratic politics in California, so he would be likely to have had frank treatment from Sam Houston. Notice of him, moreover, had been enhanced by a recent marriage to the prominent actress, "an early day Shirley Temple," Jean Davenport.<sup>33/</sup>

Lander had come east to Washington in early 1861 to resign his wagon road superintendency and to arrange some other venture. While casting about, he had attracted the interest of the new Secretary of State, Seward, in early March. On March 10 Seward wrote Lincoln a note proposing to bring him to Lincoln that evening.<sup>34/</sup> Lander at the time was intending to go back west, to the Pacific coast.<sup>35</sup> It happened that, just after that, rumor was reaching Washington leading to a belief that there was reason for some secret contact with Sam Houston. For that purpose, Lander would be ideal as a messenger; his appearance in Texas, perhaps seeming en route to the west coast, should stir no suspicion.

The rumor came at about the time that General Scott's direction for the Texas evacuation had been sent off, undoubtedly with Lincoln's acquiescence, on March 12. As reported in the New York Times of March 14, the word was that Governor Houston was "raising troops on his own account" to resist secessionists; in a comment, the Times quoted Houston's January 20 letter to General Twiggs, inferring it to mean that the Governor proposed to combat the "unauthorized mob" of secessionists. That report was followed in the Times of March 19 with a Washington dispatch saying that "an armed collision between the Disunionists and the Unionists under Houston" was indicated, and urging that United States troops in Texas should not be evacuated.<sup>36/</sup> With such word coming to Washington, Lincoln must have decided that the United States forces should maintain a foothold in Texas so that support could be provided the Unionists as developments might call for. So he had

General Scott drastically modify the March 12 direction to Colonel Waite by his March 19 letter. And he had Seward send Lander to Houston after being shown Scott's letter; it seems that the State Department provided Lander with the funds for the trip.<sup>37/</sup>

General Scott by this time had concluded, from his experience in trying to communicate with one of his units waiting offshore at Pensacola, that "the mail & the wires could not be trusted" in the deep South; even his overland couriers to Pensacola had been arrested or had turned back; so he was resorting to transmissions, in duplicate, by two naval vessels.<sup>38/</sup> Now, to reach Colonel Waite in San Antonio, he had to risk overland from the Texas coast, but at least he could circumvent all the rest of secession land by transmission via Indianola on the Gulf. So both Lieutenant Collins, with the original of the March 19 letter, and a second courier, with the duplicate, were sent off to Indianola.<sup>39/</sup>

The wording of the March 29 letter from Lander that Colonel Waite received on the day before the couriers reached him makes it evident that Lander had seen the text only of the original of General Scott's message, without the very important postscript that was added to the duplicate. Had he seen the postscript, Lander would not have had to plead, as he did in his letter, that Waite await "further instructions from Washington prior to making the intrenched camp at Indianola" -- for the postscript on the duplicate made it explicit that, were there no Texans "in arms in defense of the Federal Government," the letter's instructions were "withdrawn," so that the complete evacuation as contemplated in the earlier March 12 direction should proceed.<sup>40/</sup>

It is inconceivable that that most significant postscript would have been appended without Lincoln's knowledge and approval. For March 19 was a time when, in Washington, Lincoln, all his Cabinet, and General Scott were wrestling with the great question whether to evacuate, or to attempt support for, remaining United States posts in the land of secession. The answer to be given would determine whether there would be peace or, almost certainly, war. The answer to the question, in process of being reached, was that support would be attempted. But it seems that nowhere in the Lincoln Papers or other records is there a suggestion that support would be attempted save for Fort Sumter at Charleston and Fort Pickens at Pensacola, unless, in the case of Texas, Unionists there were found already to be in arms against rebellion. Most certainly, a decision meekly to leave Texas unless among Texans there already were civil war would not have been made without Lincoln's full approval.

Thus far in the story we have been able to point to records, with speculation both minimized and based on high probability. But the rest of the story is by no means clear. In what form was the overture to Houston, what was his inclination at the time, and precisely what was proposed to him? On these questions, records fail to provide answers.

It would seem reasonable to guess that, on a matter of such importance, there would have been some sort of writing to Houston rather than the mere oral word of a messenger who held no official position. But it appears that Houston himself never said

that there was a writing. His September 1861 letter for newspaper publication, that we referred to at the outset, said only that he had been "tendered the aid . . . ." The nearest to direct evidence that there was a writing is in an account more than fifty years later by one who, in 1861, had been a young State judge on intimate terms with Houston. But his account was based, not on what Houston had told him, but on what he had been told (when is not specified) by one of a group of allies whom Houston is said to have called in to consult on his response to a Lincoln letter, brought by "a confidential messenger," saying that "Lincoln was willing to send 50,000 troops to aid in keeping Texas in the Union." Though the group was opposed to secession, "they each advised against resistance to the Convention. Then Houston stepped to the fire and burned the letter . . . ." <sup>41</sup>/

There is another account, written a few years earlier by one who also had his information from one of those who had been called into conference by Houston. It stated that Houston informed the group "that a gentleman was then in Austin who had delivered to him a special message from Mr. Lincoln to the effect that at the proper time he would land a large body of Federal troops on the Texas coast" if Houston would undertake "to hold the State in the Union . . . ." <sup>42</sup>/ That account will be referred to in more detail in a moment. It did not say that there was a letter from Lincoln; a "message" could have been oral, or it could have been in a writing from someone else. There is a hint that a writing to Houston brought by Lander was a letter from ex-Congressman Hamilton. John Bigelow,



who became famed in the diplomatic service, wrote in his memoirs that on a train trip he had had a conversation with Thurlow Weed, political boss of New York and intimate of Seward. Weed told him that "the Cabinet had just sent Colonel Landor [sic.] down to Texas with letters from Mr. Hamilton, a member of Congress from Texas and a Union man, to say to General Houston that if he was disposed to fight for the preservation of the Union, the Federal Government would supply him with money and men."<sup>43/</sup> Bigelow's account places the conversation with Weed after Lincoln's inauguration, and context indicates that certainly it was before Fort Sumter. It is possible, of course, that even if Lander brought letters from Hamilton he brought also one from Lincoln.<sup>44/</sup>

Whatever the form of the offer made to Houston, his rejection of violent opposition to secession was, as we have seen from his letter to Colonel Waite, firm and blunt. But each of the two accounts, written many years later, that had been based on what each writer had been told by one or another participant in the conference called by Houston before deciding on his response, suggests that rejection had been reluctant. The more circumstantial of the two accounts -- the one referring to a "message" from Lincoln, not a letter -- said that at least four allies were in the conference. One advised acceptance. Another strongly urged rejection on the ground that war was inevitable and that acceptance would make Texas an active theatre of the conflict, with all its horror, which otherwise would be escaped because of the State's "great distance from the probable seat of war." The latter view prevailed "with a



majority of the conference," whereupon Houston announced, "Gentlemen, I have asked your advice and will take it, but if I were twenty years younger I would accept Mr. Lincoln's proposition and endeavor to keep Texas in the Union."<sup>45/</sup> The other of the two accounts attributed to Houston much the same remark as he burned what was said to have been the letter from Lincoln.<sup>46/</sup> Still another article just after the war, said to have been written by one of the participants in the conference, made no reference to such a conference. It stated that "Houston pretty well preserved the secret of the visit of the officer sent by President Lincoln to tender him assistance" and that Houston's "confidants" kept the secret. It added, "Suffice it now to say, the Government offered to go to the assistance of Houston when it was too late."<sup>47/</sup>

Whether the offer transmitted by Lander was rejected because Houston was too old or because it came too late is of limited relevance. But it is worth noting that in none of Houston's utterances as recorded in his Writings, from the early days of secession talk as the 1860 election approached on through his tussle with the Texas secession convention and thereafter, is there the slightest hint that he favored the Black Republican Lincoln, that he would shrink from revolution from the United States if he thought Southern constitutional rights violated, or that he contemplated opposing with violence a prevailing view in Texas. Indeed, in an address to the People of Texas on March 16, the eve of his deposition, he asserted that he would seek to maintain his governorship only by peaceful means, and in his last message to the Legislature,

on the day the newly declared Governor took over his office, March 18, he asserted that he would not attempt to maintain his own authority by resort to force.<sup>48/</sup> On the next day, by coincidence the day General Scott wrote his March 19 letter to Colonel Waite proposing military support for Houston "or other leader of the Union party," Houston firmly rejected armed resistance to what had become the State's authorities that was tendered by friends who came to him with arms in hand.<sup>49/</sup> All this had occurred well before Lander arrived with the offer from Washington.

In any case, what was the offer to Houston? The only direct evidence is Houston's own statement, in his letter of the following September, where he put it that he had been tendered "the aid of seventy thousand men."<sup>50/</sup> That is incredible. Certainly no word from Lincoln could have indicated such a force for Texas. Even after Fort Sumter, when on April 15 Father Abraham called the militia of the several States into service to deal with rebellion in all the deep South States, he asked for only 75,000.<sup>51/</sup> Probably Houston, post facto, was reading into a generalized offer in late March the action taken by Lincoln soon thereafter to meet rebellion in the entire tier from South Carolina to Texas. As we have seen, General Scott's March 19 message to Colonel Waite, that Lander had read before embarking on his mission to Houston, contemplated that there would be kept at the proposed "intrenched camp" at Indianola no more than twelve hundred men, with further support to depend on developments. And it was well known by Lincoln and all others in responsible authority in Washington that, at that time, the Union had

no means for ocean transport of huge numbers -- to say nothing of the fact that the total national army then was much less than 20,000 men. Indeed, back on March 11, in responding to questions from Lincoln about the possibility of reinforcing Fort Sumter, General Scott had written that it would take "six to eight months" to put together and to transport a force he recommended, 5,000 regulars and 20,000 volunteers.<sup>52/</sup>

So much for the overture via Lander. But it has been said that Lincoln sent a second messenger to Houston. On April 11 the New York Herald published the following dispatch of the day before from its Washington correspondent:

"A few weeks since a distinguished democrat was requested by Secretary Seward to go to Texas, and ascertain the state of the public mind there, and especially to converse with Governor Houston, and learn his views on the present secession movement in that State. On his return he reported that Governor Houston not only refused to accept military support from the United States government, but desired that President Lincoln should recall the regular troops from Texas. He also reported that Governor Houston urged in the strongest terms the evacuation of Forts Sumter and Pickens, stating that Arkansas would join Texas in secession in the event of coercion, or even the collection of the revenue being attempted. Governor Houston requested to be let alone, and maintained that the union party of the entire South was dead if coercion was once attempted.

"This account appeared to President Lincoln so much at variance with what was understood here to be the opinion of Governor Houston, and knowing the political proclivities of the Ambassador, the President immediately dispatched another messenger to Governor Houston, and without waiting for his return has sent forward the troops to Texas."<sup>53/</sup>

The "distinguished democrat" and "Ambassador" referred to must have been Lander, for, as we have noted, he was a Democrat and enjoyed some distinction. Also he had just returned to Washington.<sup>54/</sup>

If another messenger was dispatched to Houston, presumably he was one George H. Giddings. Ida M. Tarbell's The Life of Abraham Lincoln quotes what purports to be Giddings's own later account of what he said was a meeting he had with Lincoln and the Cabinet when he was given a long letter from Lincoln to take to Houston. The alleged letter, referring to General Twiggs's action in surrendering public property, offered to make Houston a Union general in full command in Texas with power to recruit 100,000 troops "to hold Texas in the Union," and promised the support of the whole power of the United States army and navy.<sup>55/</sup>

Tarbell says that this had occurred after Lincoln heard of the March 18 deposition of Houston as Texas Governor, of which news would not have reached Lincoln for several days. By then Lander, after seeing Scott's March 19 letter, either had just left or was about to leave on his mission to Houston. The Giddings story, however, says nothing of another messenger either having been sent or (as stated in the Herald) having returned and reported, a most pertinent fact that certainly would have been conveyed to Giddings at the alleged Cabinet meeting. With no such mention, the Giddings story is questionable. And surely its credibility quite disappears on considering the fact that, just then, Lincoln was taking greatest care to avoid a step that might be construed as an attack on the seceders; that care would not have permitted him to make such an

aggressive proposal as that recounted by Giddings. Moreover, it is sheer fairy tale to assert that Lincoln contemplated that Houston could recruit an army of 100,000 Unionists; aside from the fact that it was obvious that no such numbers were available, Lincoln, as we have observed, asked for only 75,000 from all the States upon Charleston's gunfire less than a month later.

In any case, the Tarbell quotation of Giddings tells only of the meeting with Lincoln and the letter; it does not say that Giddings actually went to Texas. The Herald's report of its Washington correspondent's April 10 dispatch says only that Lincoln "immediately dispatched another messenger." Houston himself, in his September letter, said that after he had rejected the aid tendered him, and had gone so far as to advise recalling all Federal troops from Texas, "when my message was reported to Mr. Lincoln by his own messenger, it appeared from confidential letter-writers in Washington, that he did not believe his agent had been faithful in the discharge of his trust in reporting my opinion." Houston speculated that Lincoln had been led into that belief by baseless charges in the press of his "treason to the South." Houston added, "So strong was his belief, as stated by the writer, in these slanders that he immediately resolved to send another messenger and troops to the South." Thus not only the Herald but a confidential report to Houston from Washington indicated at least a "resolve" by Lincoln to send another messenger. But neither Houston nor other direct source ever said that such a second messenger arrived.<sup>56/</sup>



If, as stated by the Herald and Houston, Lincoln did not decide to send that alleged second messenger until after Lander's return and report, and if he had been still on his way on April 12, he might well have been diverted. For on that day Colonel Waite's April 1 letter to Army Headquarters, enclosing a copy of Houston's March 29 letter to him, was received at the War Department, and the Secretary of War produced at a Cabinet meeting that day Houston's firm opposition to any action in Texas by the Federals.<sup>57/</sup> Surely by wire, somehow, word would have been sent, however disguised, to catch up with the messenger and cancel his mission. Moreover, on that very day guns were firing in Charleston harbor, their echoes to be heard throughout the land. Those guns made Sam Houston fully pro-Confederate. His attitude was revealed in a speech on April 19. In it he flatly denied that he ever had "intrigued" with Lincoln; he blamed Lincoln for foolishly bringing on war; and he closed with a ringing appeal for unity "to repel the enemy."<sup>58/</sup> The Giddings story was that, at the alleged Cabinet meeting, Lincoln, in explaining that he would send his letter by private hands, not by a public official, said, "Those Texans would hang any official caught with that paper."<sup>59/</sup> Had Giddings been that alleged messenger, even had he not been recalled en route, surely, in the atmosphere of unity he would have found on his arrival, he would have kept quite to himself that explosive paper from the Black Republican President.

\* \* \*

What, then, is verified in the story of the overture to Houston? Nothing more than two things. First, that Lincoln had



Lander go to Houston, or approved his going, (a) to tell Houston of General Scott's direction to Colonel Waite to maintain a limited foothold in Texas, instead of proceeding with complete evacuation, and to support Texas Unionists if they were to clash with secessionists, and (b) to ascertain Houston's attitude with a view to facilitating Colonel Waite's cooperation and such further support as, depending on developments, Washington from far away might be able to provide. Second, on further thought, surely with Lincoln's approval, Colonel Waite was told to resume full evacuation were it to be found that Unionists in Texas were not "in arms" in defense of Union. It is only post-war imagination and guesswork that make more of the story. What is verified is an important item in the history of the critical weeks on the eve of war. Though Lincoln would stand firm at Sumter and Pickens, he recognized that distant Texas was one too many for his limited means.

# FOOTNOTES

1/ The Writings of Sam Houston, 8 vols. (Amelia W. Williams and Eugene C. Barker, eds., Austin, 1938-43), 8(1943):310-14. Hereafter citation to the Writings will be to vol. 8.

2/ U. S. Stat., 5:797-98; 9:108, 446-47.

3/ Laura Roper, "Frederick Law Olmsted and the Western Texas Free-Soil Movement," American Historical Review, 56 (Oct. 1950), 58-64. For the 1860 population and ranking of San Antonio, see Population of the United States in 1860 - Compiled from the Eighth Census (G.P.O., 1864), 486-87.

4/ Writings, 145-60, 192-97, 206-12.

5/ A good biography of Hamilton is John L. Waller, Colossal Hamilton of Texas (El Paso, 1968).

6/ George B. McClellan, McClellan's Own Story (N.Y., 1887), 103-04.

7/ Memorandum of conference of Butler with Stanton, Jan. 19, 1862, p. 12, Stanton Papers, Lib. of Cong., container 2, reel 1.

8/ Stanton to McClernand, Oct. 29, 1862, Stanton Papers, container 9, reel 4; New York Times, Oct. 30, 1862, pp. 1, 4.

9/ George S. Denison to Secretary of Treasury Chase, Sept. 19, 1862 (private letter), Salmon P. Chase Papers, Lib. of Cong., container 18, reel 18; Waller, Colossal Hamilton, 36-39.

10/ Charles P. Zlatkovich, Texas Railroads - A Record of Construction and Abandonment (Austin, 1981), 5, 25, 107; Robert C. Black, The Railroads of the Confederacy (Chapel Hill, 1952), 7. Beginning soon after the war's outbreak there were proposals in the Confederate Congress to provide a rail link between Orange, Texas, on the Louisiana border at the end of one of the spokes from Houston, and a point near one of the lines in Louisiana running west from the Mississippi; such a proposal was adopted in the spring of 1862, but came to naught because of the Union capture of New Orleans on May 1. Id., 76, 160.

11/ Delay in anything interpretive is illustrated by an important item in the Times of March 14, 1861 (at p. 1; see also p. 4) based on a letter of January 20 from Governor Houston to the then Union commander in Texas (General Twiggs), to which I will refer below. By March 14, January 20 was far out of date in Texas.

12/ Writings, 265-66, 280-82; Llerena Friend, Sam Houston - The Great Designer (Austin, 1954), 336-37. The happenings in Texas are summarized in John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln - A History, 10 vols. (N.Y., 1909), 4:179-88.

13/ Writings, 265-66, 268-71, 271-78; Friend, Sam Houston, 337-38; Bruce Catton, The Coming Fury (N.Y., 1961), 234.

14/ Writings, 278-92, 293; Friend, Sam Houston, 338-40.

15/ Douglas Southall Freeman, R. E. Lee, 4 vols. (N.Y., 1934-35), 1(1934):404-18. Hereafter citation to Lee will be to vol. 1.

16/ Id., 425, 427.

17/ Id., 429; Catton, The Coming Fury, 230.

18/ Id., 228.

19/ Writings, 234-35, 278-92 at 284-85. The former citation is to Houston's letter to General Twiggs of January 20.

20/ Writings, 234-35, 268-71, 278-92; Caroline Baldwin Darrow, "Recollections of the Twiggs Surrender" and editors' note, Battles and Leaders of the Civil War, 4 vols. (Robert U. Johnson and Clarence C. Buel, eds., Thomas Yoseloff repr., N.Y. 1956), 1:33-39; Catton, The Coming Fury, 228-29. A good description of the mob-like appearance of the State troops is given in a letter from a lady in San Antonio to her mother in New York, published in the New York Times of March 15, 1861, p. 3.

21/ Freeman, Lee, 427-30; Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies, ser. 1, vol. 1, p. 597. Hereafter citation to ORA will be to ser. 1, vol. 1; it contains much documentation on events in Texas respecting both General Twiggs and Colonel Waite.

22/ Catton, The Coming Fury, 231.

23/ ORA, 523-24, 550.

24/ Id., 552-53; Nicolay and Hay, Abraham Lincoln, 4:179, 189-90.

25/ General Scott's Daily Report No. 1 to President Lincoln, April 1, 1861, Lincoln Papers, series 1, Nos. 8656-7, Lib. of Cong., reel 19.

26/ ORA, 598.

27/ Id., 550-51, 598-99.

28/ General Scott's Daily Report No. 1.

29/ Id., 550-51.

30/ Id., 551.

31/ Id., 551-52.

32/ Id., 550-51, 598-99.

33/ Ezra J. Warner, Generals in Blue (Baton Rouge, 1964), 274-75; biographical sketch with Frederick West Lander Papers, Lib. of Cong., and various documents in container 1 thereof.

34/ Various documents in Lander Papers, container 1; Seward note to Lincoln, March 10, 1861, marked "A true copy - J. G. N.", Lincoln Papers, series 1, No. 7959, roll 18. There is some uncertainty about the date of Seward's note to Lincoln for in Lincoln Papers, series 1, Nos. 8318-19, roll 19, there are what seem the original, carrying the date March 24, and another copy, also marked "A true copy - J. G. N.", dated, in different handwriting, March 24. But, as we have seen, on March 29 Lander was in Austin after seeing Houston, or having some communication with him, and it seems all but impossible for that to have happened by that time had Lander not left Washington until after March 24.

35/ Lander to Hon. C. E. Mix, March 11, 1861, Lander Papers, container 1.

36/ New York Times, March 14, 1861, pp. 1, 4; March 19, p. 1.

37/ Receipt to Lander by State Department official, April 9, 1861, for \$100.65, "being a balance of five hundred dollars paid to him, minus his account, this day rendered." Lander Papers, container 1.



Lander's dealings in Washington respecting his affairs in the west, notably settling his accounts in connection with his wagon road superintendency, are shown in container 1 to have been with the Department of Interior. So this unusual transaction with the State Department must have related to the expense of his trip to communicate with Houston. Friend, Sam Houston, 343, mistakenly dates his accounting with the State Department as April 11.

38/ General Scott's report to Secretary of War, March 30, 1861, pp. 12-13, Lincoln Papers, series 1, Nos. 8500-07, roll 19.

39/ ORA, 550-51.

40/ ORA, 551-52, 599.

41/ A. W. Terrell, "Recollections of General Sam Houston," Southwestern Historical Quarterly, 16 (Oct. 1912), 113-36 at 113, 134-35. The author says that he had been told that the messenger was one George Giddings, not Lander. I will refer below to Giddings. One historian's later account of the letter-burning episode, without citation, is an inexact distilling of the Terrell account and of another account by Charles A. Culberson that I am about to refer to. Probably by typographical error, that historian says that the offer was for "5,000 troops to coerce Texas." Ernest Wallace, Texas in Turmoil (Austin, 1965), 74-75.

42/ Charles A. Culberson, "General Sam Houston and Secession," Scribner's Magazine, 39 (May 1906), 584-91 at 586.

43/ John Bigelow, Retrospections of an Active Life, 5 vols. (N.Y., 1909-13), 1(1909):339. It may be that Hamilton left Washington for his Texas home just before Lincoln's inauguration. Waller, Colossal Hamilton, 32. But Hamilton may have lingered -- or, before leaving, may have given Seward a letter for possible use with Houston. Seward at that time was exercising extreme initiative.

44/ One story, that appeared in 1880, has it that Lander's trip occurred after Lincoln's election but many weeks before the inauguration, and that he brought Lincoln's promise that as soon as he took office he would aid in resisting secessionists. William Mumford Baker, "A Pivotal Point," Lippincott's Magazine, 26 (Nov. 1880), 559-66. Apart from the improbability of Lincoln's making any such advance commitment, that story does not stand up in light of known facts. Friend, Sam Houston, 343-44.

45/ Culberson, "General Sam Houston and Secession," 586-87. The author was a Senator from Texas at the time he wrote his story, 1906. His account does not say which "one of those present" at the consultation had told him the story. He recalled the names of four said to have been present; one was David B. Culberson. That Culberson was the father of the 1906 Senator. Biographical Directory of the American Congress 1774-1971 (G.P.O., 1971), 809.

46/ Terrell, "Recollections of Sam Houston," 135.

47/ "The Last Years of Sam Houston," Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 32 (April 1866), 630-35 at 633. Harper's does not carry the author's name. The 1906 article by Senator Culberson, just referred to, names George W. Paschal as one of Houston's conferees. Friend, Sam Houston, 345-46 n. 72, gives Paschal as the author of the Harper's article. So does Marion K. Wisheart, Sam Houston - American Giant (Washington, 1962), 612 n. 10. (Incidentally, Wisheart discusses the alleged offer by Lincoln to Houston, but adds nothing to Friend's treatment and is confused as to the timing of various events.)

48/ Writings, 271-78, 278-92.

49/ Id., 293.

50/ As we have seen, the two later accounts, based on what had been told by participants in Houston's conference with his allies, had it, in one case, that the offer was for 50,000 troops, and, in the other, for "a large body of Federal troops" to be landed on the coast. Supra, text to nn. 41 and 42. The account just after the war, by one said to have been in the conference, referred only to a tender of "assistance." Supra, text to n. 47.

51/ James D. Richardson, Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 10 vols. (G.P.O., 1896-99), 6(1897):13-14.

52/ The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, 8 vols. (Roy P. Basler, ed., New Brunswick, 1953), 4:279 n.

53/ New York Herald, April 11, p. 1. With some omissions the dispatch is quoted in Friend, Sam Houston, 343.

54/ There is some question as to the date of Lander's return. On April 9 he paid over to the State Department in Washington the unexpended balance of the money that had been advanced to him. Supra n. 37. But in Lander Papers, container 1, there is a letter to him, addressed as "Present," dated April 4, from a Treasury Department auditor regarding a balance due him on his wagon road superintendency accounting. It would have taken some doing for him to have reached Washington by April 4 after being in Austin on March 29, the date of his letter to Colonel Waite. He returned by land, at least from New Orleans. That appears from a document he submitted to the Interior Department proposing that he be awarded a contract to build a bridge in the west. The document is undated, but says that he had "just arrived" from Texas "via the seceding States." Id., container 4. The Secretary of Interior wrote him on April 11, rejecting his proposal because funds were not available. Id., container 1. A return via the seceded States would have been by railroad from Louisiana. (It is of incidental interest that, in his submission, he insisted on a special arrangement to assure payment to him "if Forts Sumpter & Pickens are reinforced," for, he said, were that to occur "civil war will ensue"

and thereupon "a claim on the U. S. Government will not be a good debt or at least not be readily collected.")

55/ Ida M. Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln, 2 vols. (N.Y., 1928 ed.), 2:69-72.

56/ The most thoroughly researched treatment of the alleged Lincoln overture to Houston has been Friend, Sam Houston, 340-47. Friend asserts that "Lincoln sent at least two messengers to Houston with offers of assistance." (340) Lander was one. Friend adds, "A second messenger sent by Lincoln to Houston was George H. Giddings . . ." (344) After some discussion of the probable time of Giddings's mission, Friend suggests that Lincoln "may well have decided to pick another courier, either before or after he knew definitively of Lander's failure." (344-45) Friend then paraphrases Tarbell's quotation of Giddings's own account of the letter for Houston allegedly given him by Lincoln at a Cabinet meeting he attended. (345) But Friend never quite asserts that Giddings actually got to Houston, though that impression is given. Friend's treatment is confusing in that abruptly, after paraphrasing Giddings's account of the letter and Cabinet meeting as quoted by Tarbell, it tells of Houston's meeting with allies to seek their advice. The reader might conclude that Friend meant that that meeting was held to consider an offer brought by Giddings. But surely it is dubious that, after having so firmly and sweepingly rejected the proposition brought by Lander, Houston would have called in



allies to consider a renewed proposition, even had it reached him before war's outbreak. Furthermore, as we have seen, both the New York Herald dispatch and what Houston said was a confidential report to him from a Washington letter-writer indicated that, if a second messenger was dispatched by Lincoln, it was after Lander's return to Washington. As I have indicated, that return may have been as soon as April 4; and in any case Lander was at the State Department on April 9. Whatever the time of his return, it seems unlikely that a second messenger could have reached Texas and caught up with the old Governor prior to war's outbreak at Fort Sumter just before April 12's dawn. It will be recalled that discussion at Houston's conference with allies shows that it was at a time when war was but in prospect, not after it had begun. Thus that conference must have been addressed to the offer brought by Lander. David M. Potter, most respected scholar of the impending crisis, does not mention an alleged second messenger following Lander, and suggests it "unlikely that there was more than one mission." Lincoln and His Party in the Secession Crisis (New Haven, 1942), 349-52, especially 350 n. 28.

57/ Register of Letters Received by Headquarters of Army (for April 12, 1861), National Archives, RG 108; "The Diary of Edward Bates," Howard K. Beale, ed., American Historical Association, Annual Report, 1930 (House Doc. No. 818, 71 Cong., 3d Sess., G.P.O., 1933), 4:182.

58/ Writings, 300-01.

59/ Tarbell, Abraham Lincoln, 2:71.





